

Cops seek clues to slaying from victim's friends

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STEVE LIEBERMAN The Journal News

NEW CITY - At times, Lissette **Hernandez** had depended on friends and strangers for shelter in Spring Valley. Now, **Clarkstown police** detectives hope some of them can help track down her killer.

The 32-year-old woman's body was found Aug. 10 with multiple stab wounds, her face and hands charred beyond recognition, on a burned swatch of grass off a cul-de-sac behind Clarkstown South High School in West Nyack.

She had been dead six to eight days, the county medical examiner estimated.

Detectives are trying to retrace events from just before **Hernandez** was killed to the evening her body was found - two days before her 33rd birthday.

Identifying her through dental work and previous dental records gave them a starting point, leading them to a string of friends, associates and relatives, Detective Lt. Charles Delo said yesterday.

"As time goes on, we're getting more and more information about her and the names of people who knew her and were associates," Delo said. "It has kind of mushroomed into many people we are talking to or are going to talk to."

Detectives think **Hernandez** was killed elsewhere, then her body dumped and set ablaze on the isolated grassy area behind the high school, about 150 yards from the New York state Thruway.

"There is always a possibility she was taken to the school and then killed and burned there," Delo said. "But we don't really believe so."

Police know that **Hernandez**, who was unemployed, had drifted among several residences in Spring Valley and Suffern during the past two years since coming from Yonkers. Her family lives in Puerto Rico.

Her last-known Spring Valley address was 91 West St., where she lived for a short time with two people who were moving out, police said. But **Hernandez** also lived in houses on nearby North Myrtle Avenue and other areas of the village.

Hernandez was stabbed a number of times in the chest, but died from a wound in her heart, Medical Examiner Frederick Zugibe ruled. Her face and hands were severely burned in an effort to conceal her identity, but Zugibe used dental records to learn her name.

"It was a brutal slaying," Delo said.

Detectives began looking for **Hernandez** when residents called to say she fit the general description of the victim - 5 feet 1 inch tall and trim, with a light complexion and dyed reddish-brown hair. She had only three teeth due to poor dental care, Delo said.

Detective Juan Roche contacted her family in Puerto Rico.

Hernandez became Rockland's second slaying victim this year. In February, Walter Papeman, 86, shot and killed his ailing wife in their Pearl River home. He pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter in July.

Hernandez's body was the second one burned to conceal the victim's identity in the past 14 months. Vinicio Valverde, 32, of Spring Valley killed his girlfriend Beatriz Alvarez, 20, in June 1998, then cut off her hands and burned her body, dumping it in a large drainage pipe. He was sentenced last month to 25 years to life in prison for second-degree murder.

Anyone with information on **Hernandez's** slaying is asked to call the Clarkstown Detective Bureau at 639-5840 or the tips hotline at 877-639-6233.